

# Martial Arts, Brazilian-Style

**I**F YOU THOUGHT "SPAGHETTI Western" seemed like an odd pairing, consider this: "Brazilian jiu-jitsu." The rich and varied culture of Brazil has met the venerable fighting style of Japan—and the result is a burgeoning martial-arts craze in the U.S. Academies that teach Brazilian jiu-jitsu, rare a few years ago, now number more than 250 nationwide. Renzo and Royler Gracie's *Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Theory and Technique* is Amazon's No. 1 martial-arts book. And as with any true trend, celebrities are

getting in on the act: Nicolas Cage and Ed O'Neill (*Married ... With Children's* Al Bundy) are among its newest converts.

What is Brazilian jiu-jitsu? Unlike most other martial arts, it involves no spectacular throws and kicks and no ceremonial bows. Unlike boxing, it has no punching. And unlike virtually every other fighting technique, it does not rely on brute strength. Brazilian jiu-jitsu is a form of self-defense that takes place almost entirely on the ground. Fighters use snakelike grappling moves to

choke their opponent, or, with the weight of their entire body, they press against key joints, bringing them close to a breaking point. Losers acknowledge defeat simply by tapping their fingers on the ground as if to say "Enough."

Part of the appeal of Brazilian jiu-jitsu is that smaller men—and women—can triumph over heavyweights. That became clear in 1993, when Royce Gracie, a 170-lb. Brazilian jiu-jitsu pro, expertly overcame 210-lb. wrestler Ken Shamrock, stunning pay-per-view audiences for the first Ultimate Fighting Championship, held in Denver. That match put Brazilian jiu-jitsu in the ring and on the map. It also gave the U.S. its initial glimpse of the Gracie clan. Royce's father Helio Gracie and his uncle Carlos Gracie spawned the fighting style in Brazil. Today their charismatic descendants—Gracie brothers, cousins and uncles—travel the world teaching regular folks how to win by bringing opponents down to earth. —By Janice M. Horowitz

**ALL CHOKED UP:**  
Using his legs, Renzo Gracie, bottom, gets the better of his cousin Rodrigo

